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## Keeping Covers In The Hobby

Even while I'm sitting here at my trusty computer... ("Trusty Computer"—*that's what I named my computer*) [*Don't laugh. Did you know that King Arthur called his spear 'Ron'?...He did!*]

...Even while I sit here at my trusty computer, I'm already thinking, "*This is pie-in-the-sky stuff; there's no way to really do this.*" But, I still believe it's worth broaching the subject, if for no other reason than to stir the waters a bit and perhaps be gifted with the thoughts of others. Am I the 'voice of the hobby,' here, or am I w-a-y out on a limb all by myself, or perhaps I'm somewhere in between.

I'm concerned about the flow of covers out of the hobby, perhaps never to be seen again. It's definitely happening—in two basic ways. First, non-phillumenists come into the looking for whatever they're interested in: Beer enthusiasts enter the hobby, cast their nets, and shortly thereafter leave with

their catch; the same with Coca-Cola fans, Railroad hobbyists, Disney collectors, and the list goes on and on. I can hardly fault collectors for pursuing their interests, but...

The other way in which covers are leaving the hobby, daily, is collectors offering their covers to people outside the hobby through outlets such as ebay. True, a lot of the people who do the selling and buying here are cover collectors—hobby members—so *those* covers circulate, but stay in the hobby. Other buyers, of course, have nothing to do with the hobby. And, in any case, the seller on ebay couldn't be expected to be able to differentiate between the two.

On the other side of the coin, we have lots of covers coming into the hobby all the time—people donate their matchbooks to collectors, wanting only that they be appreciated by someone [*I have such a shipment winging its way to me even as we speak*]; the sleuths of the hobby are forever finding accumulations, stashes, and hitherto unknown treasures as they search garage sales, flea markets, antique stores, and the like; some go one step farther and advertise locally for such accumulations tucked away in closets, attics, and storage units; and, of course, there are the unsung heroes of the hobby who pound the streets in the tried-and-true manner—searching for new covers from restaurants, hotels, etc. [*and let us not forget our stalwart peers who make the ultimate sacrifice by enduring*

*strip joints, adult clubs, burlesque houses, and brothels just to ensure that the rest of us get those covers!* —*I once went to the famous Palomino Club in Las Vegas to see if they had any new Girlie covers. They didn't...but I stayed for three performances...just to make sure!*]

Does the incoming balance the outgoing? Well, if I had to take a guess as the actual numbers involved, I'd have to say we probably have more covers coming into the hobby than leaving...but, for me, at least, I don't find that all that consoling.

Why? Part of it may be that as a collector, I simply 'want it all'! Unreasonable? Perhaps...How about something a little more endearing? Some of those covers leaving the hobby *are* real treasures, and the hobby will never see them again. A small example: how many of us collect Group I, or, more specifically, Group I Sports? I certainly do! But I don't have most of them...and how many of those are currently sitting in card shops or lining some sports fanatic's basement wall [*right next to Sammy Souza's corked bats*]?

How often do we hear from new collectors that the covers they want aren't available because the 'old timers' are sitting on them? Maybe it's because many of those covers simply aren't in the hobby anymore. Rationally, I know nothing can be done about it, but still I'm concerned.